

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 29, through page 2, line 17, with the following rewritten paragraph:

During intensive studies to solve the problems above, the inventors have found an unexpected function of Cr. Namely, although Cr, an element effective in enhancing hardenability and temper softening resistance, is also known to be effective in improving sag resistance and fatigue limit similarly to Si, use of Cr in a greater amount resulted in no improvement of fatigue life but rather in deterioration in toughness and ductility, and thus, use of Cr is kept at a substantially lower amount of about 1% (see Examples in the above Patent Documents 1 and 2). However, the inventors have found that Cr has a function to improve fatigue strength and sag resistance without ~~decreasing~~ increasing defect sensitivity. More specifically, while a spring has been produced from a steel material (wire rod), for example, in the processes of wire drawing, oil tempering, coiling, shot peening, presetting, and others in this order, the shot peening, in particular, is important in applying a residual compression stress on the surface and thus improving the fatigue life of the spring. However, when the Cr content in a steel material is larger, oxidation occurs along the grain boundaries during oil tempering, and this intergranular oxidation layer reduces the amount of the residual compression stress applied during shot peening, consequently prohibiting improvement in fatigue life. The inventors have found that it is possible to use the potential function of Cr decreasing the defect sensitivity more effectively and thus to prevent shortening of the fatigue life even when defects exist, by controlling the intergranular oxidation during oil tempering.